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Simple Visual Aids in the Teaching of English

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They come and go,
They come and go;
Each year they come and go,
Fair youth and fine.
They pause awhile
Before my desk
And look with quiet eyes;
They weigh and weigh
My little pictures,
And then they go.
I watch them pass
With troubled heart
And hope I've shown aright.

— ANONYMOUS

For many years, in fact as long ago as the time of Comenius, visual aids have been used in teaching. Perhaps that is the reason why today the simpler visual aids are neglected. Too often motion pictures and lantern slides are overstressed and blackboards, charts, diagrams, pictures, maps, and bulletin boards are excluded from the list of valuable aids. The average teacher envisions progressive methods of teaching and strives to show her ability by a flashy unit of work; she suddenly announces that tomorrow her class is to see the movie, *Ivanhoe*, — the climax of six weeks of good hard drill, paraphrasing, and composition. It is not my intention to belittle the value of movie films or slides, but rather, to raise to a conscious level the importance of all visual aids, and

to show that, until the simpler techniques are utilized, the more elaborate ones cannot accomplish the purposes for which they are intended, i.e., to instruct and to make vicarious experiences more vivid. Believing that experience is the greatest teacher, but realizing that direct experience in all units of instruction is not possible, the writer hopes to demonstrate how visual instruction is a "happy medium" through which teaching may be vitalized.

The activity and experience school is being challenged. The Eight-Year Study of progressive education has been completed, but the administrator of the small and average high school is not convinced that such a complete change in curriculum is possible or probable in his school and with his teaching staff. The average teacher is impressed by the glowing accounts of how a class made its own movie of *Silas Marner* or *Macbeth* but often fails to realize that all the pictures, maps, and stagecraft entailed much previous study before the final production. Too often the administrator insists that the school must have a projector, a slide lantern, or film machine, but is not insistent that the bulletin boards be utilized. A school board is justified in not granting money for these more advanced visual aids until the teachers can demonstrate a need for them and show that available visual aids are utilized. The need for instruction in the use of visual aids in the teacher-training institutions is a thesis in itself.

It is true that visual presentation should be more effective than auditory because the reaction time is far less for visual than for auditory impressions, but the over-enthusiasts of the more advanced visual aids have, to some extent, defeated their purpose by making extreme claims as to the powers of these visual aids. They have stressed the use of motion pictures, elaborate slides, and expensive equipment to such an extent that it seems as if they would have one believe them to be the panacea for all educational deficiencies. Not only is such a conception false but it is misleading and a detriment to the true value of such aids. Until the teacher has been trained in or has studied the use of simple visual aids and has grasped the all-inclusive meaning of visual aids, she is not ready to utilize the more advanced forms of visual education. Profusely illustrated textbooks are too often overlooked or no longer thought of as visual aids, but they are. The blackboard in a classroom is one of our most common means of visual aid. But too often the blackboard is not used to its best advantage. "Anything that makes a visual appeal is to be consid-

ered a visual aid, whether it is the excursion, the chart, the graph, the map, the diagram, the picture, the scrapbook, the globe, the model, the stereograph, the slide, or the motion picture.”¹ Visual aids are, then, exactly as the term implies: aids to instruction through the visual senses. Pictures may be regarded as basic material rather than merely means of enrichment. They contribute to a sense of reality, and time and place are made to seem less remote. A recognized truth is in the old Chinese proverb, “One picture is worth ten thousand words.”

Numerous books have been written on the use of motion pictures as a visual aid to education. For this reason this paper will not discuss the use of moving pictures.² This paper will discuss simpler visual aids in the various phases of the teaching of English, i.e., reading, composition, mechanics of English, poetry, and prose.

I. Simple Visual Aids

The Blackboard:

In the many lists of visual aids one seldom finds blackboard and chalk listed. Yet the blackboard is the one visual aid of which every teacher may be fairly certain. It is the handiest visual aid, and it is the visual aid which teacher and students may use in common. It serves a useful purpose in oral composition when the pupil stands by the board as he addresses the class and illustrates his talk by means of rapidly drawn sketches. In discussing grammar, outlining, spelling, vocabulary, and all mechanics of English, the teacher and students may save time and increase understanding by a simple illustration on the blackboard. Whole classes in literature may be centered around a literary chart drawn on the blackboard. Catchy quotations, thought-provoking passages, or a line of poetry placed on the blackboard may give the class a running start on an interesting class discussion. Alfred Hitchcock very cleverly expresses the need for the blackboard: “If as a teacher of literature and composition I should be forbidden the use of a blackboard, I should — well, I should be forced to invent a whiteboard and an ebony-hued crayon. Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other end is a good definition of the essentials of a college, but as I picture in imagination this ideal institution, I can definitely see the teacher lean to one side,

¹ H. B. Wilson, G. C. Kyte, and H. G. Lull, *Modern Methods in Teaching* (Silver, Burdett and Co.; New York, 1924), p. 232.

² A good summary of material on this subject has been compiled in *Motion Pictures in Education* by E. Dale, F. Dunn, C. Hoban, and E. Schneider (H. W. Wilson; New York, 1937).

brush clean a little space on the ground, and with a pointed stick make significant marks at which the student gazes intently."³

Bulletin Board:

The use of the bulletin board is the first evidence of visual aid that one usually sees on entering a classroom. Because of this fact one often wonders how much of the material on the bulletin board is there for teaching purposes or how much is there to impress the casual visitor, the state inspector, or the principal. Inspect the bulletin board and then visit the class. Is there any connection? Does the teacher use this material as an aid to her teaching? If the students have contributed to the bulletin board, and it is hoped that they have, the teacher must make certain that this material is noticed; she must call attention to it and make use of it. Perhaps the teacher may not consider the contributed picture or article especially helpful to the teaching or lesson on that day, but she can use it as a motivation, a means of stimulating interest on the part of others, and of encouraging each student to contribute more and more to *his* classroom.

The position of the bulletin board in a classroom may affect its usefulness. Is it near the door where everyone can see it and must pass it? Or is it hidden behind a door or in an obscure corner in the room?

Maps and Charts:

Maps, charts, and diagrams are simple visual aids which a teacher should utilize and make accessible to the students. They are especially useful in presenting abstractions and assisting in analysis. Today charts are used to read by, and if the students do not know how to read them, they must be taught. How can one teach a student to read a chart without showing one to him? For example, I might say the four outstanding and most widely used graphs are the bar graph, the circle graph, the curve graph, and the picture graph, but to teach a student to read these graphs I would need to show him pictures and illustrations of the four kinds of graphs.

Exhibits:

Exhibits serve the teacher not only as a teaching aid, but also as evidence that her teaching has been effective or that her pupils are interested. Exhibits are available from the various museums, but in many instances the experience of collecting and organizing

³ Alfred Hitchcock, *The Blackboard*, a pamphlet.

the material is as valuable as the exhibit itself. Collecting material for exhibits has often been the starting point for a unit on letter writing. Specimens and models brought into the classroom may serve as stimulus to further study or research. Seeing an exhibit, or better yet, preparing an exhibit, shows students the value of organization.

Stereoscope:

The stereoscope is best used as a teaching device for the individual student, and its use is chiefly recommended for remedial work because of its motivating value. This optical apparatus has the advantage of producing the appearance of solidity or depth. Since the stereoscope is definitely for individual participation, it is used effectively during preparation of an assigned lesson. It is well to have as many stereoscopes as possible so that they may be available in the classroom.

Slides:

Lantern slides in the classroom need not be the result of teacher activity only, for the students may easily be taught to make the slides. A slide consists of two thin pieces of glass, a cover glass and one containing the picture, which are bound together by means of gummed tape. The slides should illustrate a particular topic under discussion, and should be clear, and have good distribution of light and shade. Not only do students enjoy making the slides, but the activity is motivation for original work. Students many times will read a great deal of material in order to get a suitable subject for a slide. It is well to impress the student that it is not important to use a large number of slides. The number of ideas expressed in each slide is the important thing. A Kodak negative or print produced in the form of a slide may be reproduced so that every student may find that he can contribute to a lesson in which the projector is used. Original drawings in India ink on a clean piece of slide glass make very effective slides.

The projector is one of the most satisfying visual aids which can be employed in group work. The image remains quiet so that study and discussion may continue as long as interest lasts. For this reason the slide is valuable in socialized recitations.

Photographs and Prints:

Almost every day we encounter some photograph, print, advertisement, or cartoon which is applicable to some phase of

teaching. Outstanding sources of picture material are the *National Geographic*, *Asia*, *Travel*, *Mentor*, *Nature Magazine*, *Life*, and the rotogravure sections of Sunday papers. A teacher should establish some system of filing what she finds, so that she can find what she wants when she wants it, and so that her orderliness may be an example to her students.⁴ The fact that students observe the teacher's habit of collecting may have as much to do in their desire to contribute to the class as interest in the subject. This is not the most desirable objective, but it will help to form the habit and lead to greater interest in the subject at hand.

II. Visual Aids at Work in the English Classroom

In Reading:

The poor reader must first of all be encouraged to want to read. Therefore, the more attractive books that the teacher can have about the room, the better it is and the easier it is for her to observe her students as they select books for leisure reading. The brightly illustrated dust covers of new books can make an attractive display on the bulletin board, and, moreover, may give some students an idea for an original illustration of some book which they may have read. In magazines may be found allusions to books in which students may be interested; examples are profuse.

A second point in a reading class is to explain to the students what you are trying to do. So often teachers talk glibly of increasing eye-span, but the student does not visualize what is meant. In her book, *Improvement of Reading*, Miss Cole illustrates not only how eye-movements may be increased in length by practice, but also presents exercises which very well illustrate to the students what is meant by eye-span.⁵ With such illustrations, a teacher can easily show the student that the fewer fixations made per line, the more rapidly one may read.

Visual aids in the remedial reading programs have advanced rapidly in the last fifteen years, e.g., the use of the metronoscope and the films. These devices are helpful, and likewise add motivation, for they are novel and interesting to the student. However, these aids are for the use of the reading specialists.

⁴ For suggestions see Lucia Mirrieles, *Teaching Composition and Literature*, Appendix A, pp. 565-567. (Harcourt, Brace & Co.; New York, 1943).

⁵ Luella Cole, *Improvement of Reading* (Farrar & Rinehart; New York, 1940), Chapter 5.

In Composition:

It is to be stressed that, in order to write, the student must have something to write about. We may be able to stimulate the student's imagination by a quotation written on the blackboard; we may be able verbally to suggest a topic; but often a picture is advantageous in presenting an idea. Magazine covers, selected with care, may be advantageously used to suggest whole stories; they may become a subject for description. Character development may be vitalized by pictures, and very often caricatures may be utilized in presenting a unit on the writing of character sketches.

Since colors are generally known to the students, it may be helpful to use them when one wishes to stimulate more colorful language, e.g., some bright red words may be *brusque*, *blushing*, *blooming*, some greenish yellow words may be *billious*, *drab*, *lurid*.

Pictures may be used to introduce a unit on metaphorical language. An example which comes to mind is the picture of a sandstone formation near Carneiro, Kansas, which resembles a mushroom and is called the Mushroom of Stone. With such a picture, it is easy to show that the referent has some of the qualities of the vehicle.

In Mechanics of English:

No doubt the most accessible and constant visual aid which the teacher of English mechanics uses is the blackboard. Illustrative sentences would be only half as effectual if given orally. Colored chalk is also catchy to the eye if used at the point being stressed; it is often more effective than underlining, for we teachers have overworked underlining. It is well to be careful to label the work put on the blackboard and not to leave on incorrect examples. The incorrect example has its place in pointing out differences, but if it is allowed to remain, the student, in looking over the material five minutes later, may forget that it is an example of the wrong usage.

The modern textbooks give many illustrations of the marks of punctuation, e.g., stop and go signals for the period and capital letter. These illustrations may be used as incentive to original drawings by the students.

Sentence sense has been cleverly illustrated in texts, but it has often been found advantageous to enlarge some of the pictures on the blackboard. If the students' text does not have helpful illustrations, the teacher can retrace, or ask an artistic student to trace some on the blackboard or for the bulletin board.

In teaching vocabulary, one is helped by a picture which illustrates a new word or describes the derivation of a word. *The Picturesque Word Origins* by G. and C. Merriam Co. (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1933), does this very well and suggests the sort of thing which a teacher who is conscious of this device will notice and take advantage of. An alphabetical filing of words is advantageous to the teacher and pupil, for the teacher can quickly draw out the word under discussion and the student may be led to add to the collection. Such a filing system is most easily compiled on 3 x 5 cards.

Differences in the spelling of homonyms may often be illustrated beyond merely writing them on the blackboard, e.g., (1) a picture of *two* watches, (2) a picture of a man who has a watch, *too*, (3) a picture of a watch which is *too* big for his pocket, (4) a picture of a man taking his watch *to* the repair shop.

Each of these devices is merely another way to draw attention and to focus attention upon the question at hand.

In Poetry:

The use of visual aids in the teaching of poetry is fairly well established and practiced. Only when children are interested in the subject matter can they fully appreciate the significance of poetic verses. If one has simply taken time to collect some pictures of the sea or ships, a sea poem may become more real. The "Minute Man" becomes more real when we see a picture of the statue erected to his memory. Pictures of the Roman Forum, arrangement of the Senate, and the dress and customs of that period make *Julius Caesar* live again. So it is with a goodly portion of poetic drama and poetry. Film and picture companies are aware of this need and many good collections are available.⁶

In Prose:

It has been said that interest precedes appreciation. This is especially true of literature. For example, a picture of the Alhambra with Granada in the foreground would surely help the young reader to appreciate "The Alhambra" by Irving.

The bulletin board has been effectively used to illustrate the relation between the incidents in London and Paris in *The Tale of Two Cities*. The bulletin board was divided down the middle;

* Ideal Picture Co., 30 E. 8th Street, Chicago, Illinois.
School Library Laboratory, Teachers College, Columbia University,
New York.

Eastman Educational Slide Co., Iowa City, Iowa.

on the left was London; on the right was Paris. A thread or ribbon was then used to follow the incidents back and forth. Each incident was labeled, e.g., "The Ride to Dover," "Mr. Lorry Meets Miss Manette," "A Wine-cask Is Broken in Front of the Defarge Wine Shop," etc. Concept of unity and continuation was given to the story. Pictures and illustrations added to make the display more complete, vivid, and attractive.

The teaching of the *Odyssey* can be made to seem more real with a map of the Mediterranean Sea. Unless the student can be made to visualize the many times that Ulysses was thrown backward on his course, it is hard to explain why he was so long in reaching home. The kind of ship in which he traveled can be presented to the student through pictures or models. The young modern has had no occasion to know of the type of ship in which Ulysses traveled. This is even more true in the middle sections of our country, where sailing is not a common sport and boats or ships other than a canoe or flat boat are unknown.

Actual ship models stimulate interest in reading *Treasure Island*. To make any model entails careful reading and study. A student who was inspired to make a model of Raveloe enlisted the aid of several students and great discussion developed; much re-reading and real study were necessary to determine the exact proximity of the stone pit to Silas' cottage, to the Rainbow Inn, and to Raveloe.

Pictures from magazines portray characters in stories, e.g., many interesting and worth-while notebooks have been compiled by students when they are reading *Silas Marner*. Often these notebooks, left in the library, are a real contribution toward awakening interest in other students.

These are only a few of the ways in which visual aids may be of use to the teacher of English. Once she is conscious of the simple visual aids which are around her in everyday life, she will utilize and appreciate the value of all visual aids. She cannot afford to overlook them.

A Study of University of Illinois Rhetoric 0 Students

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September 1943 marked the inauguration of a new method of treating students failing the Rhetoric proficiency examination given every Freshman entering the University of Illinois. Such students were denied admission to Rhetoric 1 but were given the opportunity to enroll in a remedial, non-credit course called Rhetoric 0. The object of this paper is to report the high school background, courses of study, and scholastic records of the students who registered in Rhetoric 0 in the first semester of the 1943-1944 school year. The information used for this study is limited by its source, the official records of the University Registrar. The validity of the study is qualified by the small size of the first Rhetoric 0 group, the total number so classified being 139. Furthermore, the study covers a period of war years, when the college enrollment, student attitude, and student performance were going through various transformations.

I. High School Background

Each student's high school rank and the number of English units he completed constitute the available statistics on high school background. Since the information on high school rank is not given in synonymous percentages, the statistics in Table 1 overlap.

The figures would indicate that those who graduate in the upper 50% of their class have almost as many representatives in

TABLE 1

High school rank	Number of students	Percentage of students in rank
None listed.....	15	11%
Upper 50%.....	64	46%
Lower 50%.....	60	43%
(Given quartile extremes)		
Upper 25%.....	25	18%
Lowest 25%.....	37	27%

TABLE 2

Units of high school English completed	Number of students	Percentage of students
5	1	.7%
4½	3	2.1%
4	82	59.0%
3½	23	16.5%
3	30	21.5%

Rhetoric 0 as do those who graduate in the lower 50%. Similarly, there is not too great a distinction between the representation of the extreme quartiles. Several conjectures could be made from these statistics: there may be little correlation between high school and university grades; there may be little correlation between Rhetoric deficiency and high school rank, since many high school English courses emphasize literature at the expense of grammar and, more particularly, composition. These remain but possibilities. The only conclusive statement warranted by these figures is that high school rank does not appear to have much bearing on Rhetoric 0 placement.

The figures in Table 2, showing the units of high school English completed by the students, prove even more ambiguous. Is the conclusion to be that four years of high school English are of less value to students of Rhetoric than three? This might be true, since in many schools the fourth year of English is devoted exclusively to literature. However, an examination of the English units of students placed in Rhetoric 1 might very well indicate the same distribution. It is still customary for the majority of high school students to take four years of English. However, it is noteworthy that 38% of the Rhetoric 0 group had less than four units.

II. Course of Study

The term *course of study* is used here in its most general sense — the college. Table 3 shows the proportion of freshmen in each college who were in the Rhetoric 0 group. The figures would seem to indicate that there is a high correlation between courses of study and Rhetoric deficiency. Students enrolled in Physical Education are likely to be deficient in Rhetoric. The students in vocational and technical courses such as Agriculture and Engineering are likely to show less Rhetoric proficiency than those in the more

TABLE 3

College student enrolled in	Number of freshmen in college in Rhetoric 0	Number of freshmen in the college	Percentage of the college's freshmen in Rhetoric 0
L.A.S.	51	1228	4.15%
F.A.A.	8	138	5.79%
COMMERCE	12	174	6.89%
ENGINEERING	28	220	12.72%
AGRICULTURE	25	158	15.82%
P.E.	15	25	60.00%

academic courses represented by Liberal Arts and Sciences, Fine and Applied Arts, and Commerce.

III. Scholastic Record

One of the pertinent questions this study poses is: how does the Rhetoric 0 student fare in his Rhetoric courses? Table 4 indicates this.

The statistics in Table 4 deal, obviously, with a diminishing number of students. It is significant that over half the students in Rhetoric 0 passed the course. In spite of a semester's remedial work, 42 remained below the standards for admission to Rhetoric 1. Of those who failed, 5 repeated the course with success, for

TABLE 4

Rhetoric course No.	Number of students in course	Grade in course	Number of students in course still in residence
0	22	C	8
0	51	D	12
0	42	E	5
1	4	B	2
1	28	C	13
1	23	D	8
1	9	E	1
2	7	B	7
2	19	C	9
2	7	D	7
2	1	E	0

TABLE 5

Scholastic average	Comparable letter grade	Number of students with that average
No grades	22
Under 1.5	Under E+	14
1.5 to 2.	E+ to D	20
2. to 2.5	D to D+	23
2.5 to 3.	D+ to C	18
3. to 3.5	C to C+	27
3.5 to 4.	C+ to B	11
4. to 4.5	B to B+	4

they still remain in school. One half of those who survived to take Rhetoric 1 received a C or above in that course. There were 4 students who had worked up to a B grade. In Rhetoric 2, 7 students made a grade of B, and 26 out of 34 received a C or above. The figures on the students still in school would seem to indicate that the Rhetoric grade was not the determining factor in failure to complete college work.

The figures in Table 5 give the range of the scholastic averages of Rhetoric 0 students. These scholastic averages are based on the amount of work each student completed, which varies from 1 to 7 semesters. Table 5 clearly shows that less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the group were able to do satisfactory college work, since C work is the minimum requirement of most of the colleges of the University.

Table 6 emphasizes the "mortality rate" of the Rhetoric 0 students. The term *Withdrawn* denotes voluntary action. The heading *Withdrawn, now returned* includes those called to military service and returned; they are not included under the heading *Called to military service*. The scholastic average of each group is placed below the number in it to show the probable causal relationship.

Table 6 shows the low percentage of survival of Rhetoric 0 students in the University. After the first year, 93 did not return to the University. Of these, 16 were called to military service. Including these, 67% of the Rhetoric 0 group dropped out of school. Excluding the military service withdrawals, 55% of the Rhetoric 0 group dropped out. Of the freshman class as a whole, 31%, including those called to military service, failed to return. After the second year, 15% of the group dropped out. Later statistics on the class as a whole are not reliable for comparison,

TABLE 6

Semesters completed.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6 or more	Total
No. of students dropped by Univ....	0	22	15	3	5	1	0	46
Their University average.....	0	1.42	2.08	2.15	2.24	2.70	0	
No. of students to military service..	5	6	5	0	0	1	0	17
Their University average.....	0	3.09	3.00	0	0	2.25	0	
No. of students withdrawn.....	17	16	7	3	6	1	1	51
Their University average.....	0	2.59	3.04	2.71	2.95	3.30	3.67	
No. of students withdrawn now returned.....	0	1	1	2	3	0	0	7
Their University average.....	0	3.39	1.48	3.55	2.78	0	0	
No. of students in res., 1943-1946..	0	0	0	0	0	12	6	18
Their University average.....	0	0	0	0	0	3.48	3.20	
								139

as the influx of returning veterans swelled the class numbers. After two and one half years, however, only 25 of the 139 remained in school — approximately 18%.

This study would seem to indicate that the majority of the Rhetoric 0 students are mentally slow. Their grade averages show that most of them were not able to do college work satisfactorily. They failed not only in Rhetoric, but also in their other subjects. There is, however, a minority whose deficiency must be attributed to poor previous training rather than low mentality. This conclusion is substantiated by the fact that 18% of this group succeeded with the help of remedial work.

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